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Having described the invention, we claim the following:

1. An apparatus for transporting laboratory animals, the apparatus comprising:

a container defining a cavity for housing at least one laboratory animal, the container having an open top;

a cover piece being connectable with the container for closing the open top of the container, the cover piece having a passage through which the at least one laboratory animal passes during insertion into and extraction from the cavity; and

a closure piece being associated with the cover piece and including a portion that is rotatable relative to the cover piece between a first position in which the portion of the closure piece closes the passage in the cover piece to retain the at least one laboratory animal within the cavity and a second position in which the passage in the cover piece is open to permit the insertion and extraction of the at least one laboratory animal through the passage, the closure piece also including a plurality of air passages which permit airflow into and out of the

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cavity, filter material covering the air passages for preventing contaminants from entering the cavity.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the closure piece, when in the first position, seals against the cover piece to prevent airflow into the cavity other than through the air passages.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the cover piece includes a viewing aperture for inspection of the cavity, the closure piece including a transparent portion which overlies the viewing aperture.

4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the closure piece includes a hinge that rotatably connects the rotatable portion of the closure piece to a remainder of the closure piece.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the closure piece is formed from a thermoplastic material and wherein the filter material is also formed from a thermoplastic material, the filter material being heat welded to the closure piece on a side of the closure piece opposite the cavity.

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6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the cover piece includes an aligning pin, the aligning pin extending upwardly from the cover piece in a direction opposite the container, the closure piece including an aperture for receiving the aligning pin.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the cover piece includes an upper wall, a plurality of protrusions that extend upwardly from the upper wall of the cover piece in a direction opposite the container, the protrusions being capable of supporting a second container in a stacked relationship above the upper wall of the cover piece.

8. The apparatus of claim 1 further including a filter guard that is connectable to the closure piece for protecting the filter material from animals located outside of the cavity.

9. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the cover piece includes a recess for receiving the closure piece, a plurality of tabs extending into the recess for securing the closure piece in the recess, the

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closure piece snapping over the tabs and into the recess of the cover piece.

10. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the rotatable portion of the closure piece includes a handle portion.

11. The apparatus of claim 10 wherein the cover piece includes a recess, the handle portion of the rotatable portion of the closure piece lying adjacent the recess when the rotatable portion of the closure piece is in the first position, the recess defining a space which provides access to the handle portion.

12. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the container includes a bottom surface and at least one side wall, the at least one side wall including a plurality of air passages which permit airflow into and out of the cavity, filter material covering the air passages for preventing contaminants from entering the cavity.

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13. The apparatus of claim 12 wherein the container is formed from a thermoplastic material and wherein the filter material is also formed from a thermoplastic material, the filter material being heat welded to the container on a side of the at least one side wall opposite the cavity.

14. The apparatus of claim 13 further including a filter guard that is connectable to the at least one side wall for protecting the filter material from animals located outside of the cavity.

15. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the cover piece includes an outer periphery, at least one projection extending outwardly from the periphery of the cover piece for interlocking with similar projections on a second cover piece of a second apparatus.

16. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the closure piece includes an aligning pin, the aligning pin extending downwardly from the closure piece, the cover piece including an aperture for receiving the aligning pin.

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17. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the cover piece includes a protuberance, the passage through which the at least one laboratory animal passes being located in an upper surface of the protuberance, the protuberance also including structure for securing the closure piece to the protuberance.

18. The apparatus of claim 17 wherein a viewing aperture extends through the upper surface of the protuberance, the viewing aperture enabling inspection of the cavity, the closure piece including a transparent portion which overlies the viewing aperture.

19. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the closure piece includes a raised ridge that outlines an area of the closure piece that includes the plurality of air passages.

20. An apparatus for transporting laboratory animals, the apparatus comprising:

a container defining a cavity for housing at least one laboratory animal, the container having a rim that defines an open top of the container;

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a cover piece that is adapted to snap onto the rim of the container for connecting the cover piece to the container for closing the open top of the container, the cover piece including structure for securing the cover piece on the container to prevent removal of the cover piece from the container by the at least one laboratory animal, the cover piece further including a passage through which the at least one laboratory animal passes during insertion into and extraction from the cavity; and

a closure piece that is adapted to be supported by the cover piece, the closure piece including a portion that is rotatable relative to the cover piece between a first position in which the portion of the closure piece closes the passage in the cover piece to retain the at least one laboratory animal within the cavity and a second position in which the passage in the cover piece is open to permit the insertion and extraction of the at least one laboratory animal through the passage.

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21. The apparatus of claim 20 wherein a plurality of air passages extend through one of the cover piece and the closure piece, the plurality of air passages permitting airflow into and out of the cavity, filter material covering the air passages for preventing contaminants from entering the cavity.

22. An apparatus for transporting laboratory animals, the apparatus comprising:

a container defining a cavity for housing at least one laboratory animal, the container having a bottom wall, at least one side wall, and an open top, the at least one side wall including a plurality of air passages that permit airflow into and out of the cavity, filter material covering the air passages for preventing contaminants from entering the cavity; and

structure for closing the open top of the container for retaining the at least one laboratory animal in the cavity, the structure including an outer periphery and a first mating protrusion that extends outwardly in a first direction beyond the outer periphery of the structure, the first mating protrusion being constructed for engaging a corresponding mating projection of an adjacent apparatus that is located



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beside the apparatus so as to prevent movement of the apparatus relative to the adjacent apparatus in a second direction that is perpendicular to the first direction.

23. The apparatus of claim 22 wherein the structure further includes a second mating protrusion that extends outwardly in the second direction beyond the outer periphery of the structure and is constructed for engaging a second corresponding mating protrusion of a second adjacent apparatus so as to prevent movement of the apparatus relative to the second adjacent apparatus in the first direction.

24. The apparatus of claim 22 wherein the first mating protrusion includes first and second projections, a space separating the first projection from the second projection.

25. The apparatus of claim 24 wherein the first projection extends outwardly in the first direction from the structure by a first distance and wherein the second projection includes a first portion that extends outwardly in the first direction from the structure by

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a second distance that is greater than the first distance.

26. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the second projection also includes a second portion that extends outwardly in the first direction from the structure by the first distance, the second portion of the second projection being located opposite the first portion of the second projection from the first projection.